

# Schadenfreude And Fashion-Themed Shows On Television

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## Abstract

Violence which is subject to the lots of television programs such as news, films, serials and even cartoons has been also shown in fashion-themed shows verbal and nonverbal ways so often. Presentation of violence on screen is a big problem but there is another problematic situation as important as it: being delighted by watching the violence. Fashion-themed shows are typical samples of the competitions which symbolic violence is visible. This situation might be explained by the notion of “schadenfreude” which means taking pleasure from pain and misfortune of the other people. Fashion-themed shows which are the example of Reality TV are so popular worldwide and also in Turkey. They are interesting examples of the schadenfreude that has become visible. In this study, expressions of the contestants, jury and presenter will be examined in order to reveal the signs of the pleasure which competitors show when another competitor find herself in a difficult situation and also indicators of the symbolic violence.

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**Keywords:** Symbolic violence, *schadenfreude*, fashion-themed shows

## Introduction

Violence, disaster and misfortune are becoming more familiar parts of our everyday lives and we watch them on television every day and night. Violence which is subject to the lots of television programs such as news, films, serials and even cartoons has been also shown in fashion-themed shows verbal and nonverbal ways so often. Insult, taunt, humiliation and verbal abuse sometimes from a jury member toward a contestant or from a contestant toward another have become normal situations that might be encountered in almost every episode. They nearly have been accepted as the format requirements of the program and tolerated even fueled. Presentation of violence on screen is a big problem but there is another problematic situation as important as it: being delighted by watching the violence.

It is not a tall to say that TV shows have already turned into a Roman arena today. Audience has been eagerly sitting in front of their televisions with the questions such as “*Will the jury detract who this week?*” or “*Which contestants will spar?*” and has been nearly sorry if there is no any argument in the program like people who had fun by watching gladiators beating to death each other in the arena.

Audience is bombarded by the emotions of power, revenge, greed, jealousy continuously and feels as if watching a soap opera. Winners and losers of the previous arguments are followed with bigger interest. Expressions of humiliation, insult and taunt are the signs of symbolic violence which is imposed by the jury or contestants on each other. Symbolic violence, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1998:17), is “*violence wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents, insofar as both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it.*” Fashion-themed shows are typical samples of the competitions which symbolic violence is visible in and pleasure that is taken from symbolic violence is challenging in these programs. This situation might be explained by the notion of “*schadenfreude*” which means taking pleasure from pain and misfortune of the other people.

### **Violence, Misfortune and *Schadenfreude* in the Media**

*Schadenfreude* is a German word which is used to describe pleasure at the misfortunes of others. It is the combination of two words one of them is “*schade*” means bad events, and another is “*freude*” means joy, pleasure. So it simply is feeling pleasure at another’s suffering and infelicity and it has been viewed as a “malicious and immoral feeling” (Baudelaire,1955). There is a claim on the basis of the term as people not only experience sympathy toward the suffering of others but sometimes also enjoy it. It may be said that there is a comparison between our attitudes and behaviors with the others at the origin of the term. It might be mentioned three main kinds of *schadenfreude*: Dislike, fairness and relief.

Dislike and sometimes envy are antecedents of pleasure at another’s misfortune (van Dijk and et al, 2006) so *schadenfreude*. Zillman and Knobloch (2001) found a positive correlation between dislike and *schadenfreude*. So if we dislike a person, we are expected to elicit positive emotions when we heard bad fortunes about him/her.

According to another viewpoint, origin of *schadenfreude* is sense of fairness and deservingness (Feather,2006). Portmann (2000:13) states this situation with words of “It is not the suffering of others that brings us joy, but rather the evidence of justice triumphing before our eyes”. In other words concern for justice seems an important motive for *schadenfreude*. When we

think that someone deserves any ill treat, we generally say “it serves him right.”

The last kind of *schadenfreude* is relief. We feel relieved if we are not the person who has experience of an unpleasant situation. In his famous novel *Crime and Punishment* Dostoyevsky describes this mood in words “*The lodgers, one after another, squeezed back into the doorway with that strange inner feeling of satisfaction which may be observed in the presence of a sudden accident, even in those nearest and dearest to the victim, from which no living man is exempt, even in spite of the sincerest sympathy and compassion.*”

Consuming representations of the pain and misfortune of others is ascribed the capacity to fill the void left by diminished opportunities to experience the real thing (Rothe,2011:159). If displays of it in the media such as magazines, television shows are considered, it may be said that this feeling seems almost inherent to social being. Edmund Burke observed that people like to look at images of suffering and wrote “*I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others.*” (as cited in Sontag,2003:76).

It may be said that there is a connection between *schadenfreude* and symbolic violence. Because dislike is one of the reasons of symbolic violence. Representation of violence and misfortune in the media is one of the top issues of the communication studies. According to the Cultivation Theory of Gerbner and et al. (1979) based on violence and sexuality programs are continuously produced in the media. Because these issues are based on images not dialogue and these images are understandable all over the world. In fact while discussing the relationship of violence, misfortune and media, focal point is which representation is shown as a fault and which one is not. Besides violence and misfortune are transformed into a theatrical narrative of the lives of others and not only in the films and serials, but also in the news, shows and other programs. Bourdieu (1998:19) wrote “*The selection principle that we see on television screen frequently is search for the sensational and the spectacular. Television calls for dramatization, in both senses of the term: it puts an event on stage, puts it in images. In doing so, it exaggerates the importance of that event, its seriousness, and its dramatic, even tragic character.*”

According to Guy Debord’s (1994) society of spectacle analysis, any event must be converted to spectacle to be seen real in other words worth to watch for us and according to the 4th thesis “*The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.*”

In modern societies all of us are the audience and consumer of the theatrical violence. We watch the pain of others and violence on the screen

hands down. We consume the pain of others in misery memoirs, daytime TV shows, and media representations of violence generally like ‘fashion-themed’ shows.

### **Reality TV and Fashion-themed Shows**

Fashion-themed shows may have been accepted as the sample of factual entertainment and Reality TV genre. Reality TV is a television program category about real people and it is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama (Hill,2005:2). It is a popular sample of factual entertainment and there are lots of Reality TV programs about everything like healthcare, fashion, cooking, home, dating, marriage, crime and etc. The origins of Reality TV have been found the crossroad of entertainment, tabloidization and documentary. Especially since 1980s entertainment and tabloidization increased in media productions. Tabloidization may have been defined as putting forward the entertaining contents and as Turner (1999:37) pointed out the term was used in journalism especially news context, then it started to include all television formats. Reality TV shows are popular in a lot of countries. For example *Survivor* was number one in prime time ratings in USA. Another example *Big Brother* was the most popular program of its channel (Hill,2005:4) and it was also popular in the Netherlands, Spain, Norway and Australia.

Reality TV shows are attractive for the producers because they are tried and tested and they can be easily adapted to the local cultures. Also they are cheap to make and have regular rules. So it might be said that Reality TV programs are competition shows at the same time. Producers generally copycat the formats simply often to replicate the success of previous show. If a show has been ‘proven’ elsewhere, it is seen as minimising the possibility of failure (Holmes,2008:19). But repeated formats in different territories of the world mean global homogenisation of television. Waisbord (2004:360) has been asked “What better evidence of cultural homogenisation than format television?” and pointed to this situation in his article: “A dozen media companies are able to do business worldwide by selling the same idea and audiences seem to be watching national variations of the same show.”

Reality TV shows are also popular in Turkey. They represent the broader generic term, which then encompasses a range of subcategories like action, adventure, comedy, dating, marriage, talent, quiz, game, cooking, fashion, sports and lifestyle (Bodycombe,2003). We may mention the names of some examples in Turkey: *Survivor* is example of the game shows, *That Voice is Turkey (O Ses Türkiye)* is example of the talent shows, *We’re at Dinner (Yemekteyiz)* is example of the cooking-themed shows, *Who Wants to*

*Be a Millionaire? (Kim Milyoner Olmak İster?)* is example of the quiz shows and *Will You Be My Bride? (Gelinim Olur musun?)* is example of the dating shows.

Another examples of Reality TV shows are fashion-themed shows which may have been defined as involved members of the public as contestant who making shows for points or prizes and celebrities as jury panel. It is a category of the shows in which the competition lasts several days or weeks' and a competitor's progress through the show is based on some form of popularity contest, usually a kind of disapproval voting be their fellow competitors or the jury (Holmes,2008:14). Some of the examples over the world are *Extreme Makeover*, *Fashion Police*, *Make Me a Supermodel* and *What Not to Wear*. There are a few examples of fashion-themed shows in Turkey. First version of the format may be accepted *What Should I Wear Today?(Bugün Ne Giysem?)* which broadcasted three season between the year of 2011-2013. But actual sample is *This is My Style (Bu Tarz Benim)* which was started in September 2014. Then program channel was changed. But name and the format of program became apple of discord between two channels. At the end, court gave the name right to a channel and the format right to other channel. Some changes were made on the format then but it failed. It was ended in 2015 after nearly 60 episodes had broadcasted. Name of the show was changed as *Here is My Style (İşte Benim Stilim)* at the other channel. It broadcasted third season in 2015 and two season in 2016 and 7th season started in April 2016. So more than 400 episodes broadcasted until today. As things stand, producers and the owners of the TV channels think that this format is successful on the drawing the audience's attention. Because in May 2016, a new one began by the name "*Wardrobe Wars (Gardırop Savaşları)*."

These programs have characteristics of the Reality TV show format. Shows are that have women dress up in their best style and a panel of jury members evaluate their good or poor fashion prey in order to be named Turkey's most 'fashionable' or 'style' woman. So it should be said that these shows clearly targeted at women. Programs are produced in a studio completely. There is a 3 or 4-person jury and 13-16 young women as contestant. Competitors' clothing styles are evaluated by the jury and also other contestants. There is an episode in every weekday by day covering nearly three hours a day and fifteen hours a week. Sometimes a special style concept was given like 1980's, foreign singers or Turkish films stars to the contestants. There is an elimination (gala) programme at saturday nights. Each episode of the shows are a variety of different domains like leisure activities, entertainment, carnival, fashion, style, trends, consumerism and also interrogation and punishment. They have format characteristics of Reality TV like aim at creating emotional reactions. Reesink (2001) pointed

out that these shows transfer privacy, human relationship and sensibility of private sphere to the television screen. One of these emotions is joy of others' pain.

### ***Schadenfreude* in Fashion-themed Shows**

Fashion-themed shows interesting examples of the *schadenfreude* appeared. Arguments among the competitors who are like a bomb ready to explode and followed by crying of some competitors scenes are quite usual and ordinary in the show. It is possible to see the marks of the conflict, jealousy and revenge evoking a soap opera in the comments of the contestants. Any contestant has been evaluated by her friends (rivals) at first. During this evaluation generally presenter asks the comments of the competitors who have personal discussions before and so to say it is as an invitation to debate. Then contestant has been evaluated by the jury like a student on the board in a classroom. If a competitor is for the high jump in front of the jury, others look satisfied. In the evaluations, not only the clothing styles of the contestants are being evaluated but also their personal and physical characteristics such as statures, hip sizes, skin colors. These full of insult and humiliation parts are typical moments which *schadenfreude* and symbolic violence implemented by the jury on the competitors and also competitors on each others.

Analysis of this study aiming to point the representation of symbolic violence and *schadenfreude* of the media on the example of fashion-themed shows consists of two parts. Initially general formation and characteristic features of the program will be evaluated and then dialogues between the actors (presenter, jury and contestants) will be examined to represent the expressions of *schadenfreude* and also symbolic violence. For the analysis mainly elimination nights (gala) episodes have been preferred because rivalry is more crashing at those nights and rivalry feeds symbolic violence and also *schadenfreude*.

### **General Formation**

*This is My Style* and *Here is My Style* have characteristics of the Reality TV genre. Contestants are not celebrities and participate with their real names. This situation frequently expressed by both the presenter and contestants like the expressions "This is the reality", "We are here to live the real life" and "There are drama, pain, jealousy, success and failure in here." Holmes and Jermyn (2004:7) emphasized that program-makers of *Big Brother* do not describe it as a reality game show but as a 'real-life soap'. Soap operas have a wearing and sickening continuity with their tearful and melodramatic structure (Conrad,1982:71). In the soap operas private problems of the people have been emphasized consistently. Berman

(1987:70) wrote “*first rule of the soap opera is nobody suffer silently, every problem should has been talked in front of the public.*” Graham Murdock (2000) summarized seven sorts of talk on the reality shows as follows conversation, confession, storytelling, interviews, sales pitches, argument and debate. Confession is often revealing of the individual feelings and actions in person’s private life. Confession, argument and debate are the most preferred types in fashion-themed shows. Confession of an ordinary person in front of the public mostly carries him or her in a vulnerable position against the audience. Argument and debate are stressfull moments that are particularly preferred by the producers in order to increase the ratings.

Music is used as an component to increase the excitement. During the debates music is tense and dynamic. While competitors sharing touching stories about their private lives, music is emotional. In fact the number which was played regarding to the negative comments of a jury member is the summary of the situation: “Incoming hit, outgoing struck.”

Almost every moment, presence of a terrific rivalry has been made feel. The moments which are sometimes true and sometimes fictional have been put forward by the producers. Scenes of debates, crying and squalls are shared in trailers on the purpose of increasing the attention of the audience. Besides short videos about those scenes are shared on social networking sites like Youtube as well as on the internet sites of the shows. Short videos run with the headlines such as “tears of X”, “emotional moments in *This is My Style*”, “jury disgraced X”, “contestant X pass out in studio”, “the jury made contestant X cry.”

There is a pecking order as follows Jury–Presenter –Contestants. This hierarchy is reminded constantly by the presenter and also jury.

### **Expressions of the Actors**

Second part of the analysis will try to demonstrate signs of the *schadenfreude* and symbolic violence in the expressions of the jury, presenter and contestants. In fact there are big or small examples of them nearly in every episode but we tried to choose specific and highlights expressions.

### ***Signs of Schadenfreude***

As mentined above dislike is the first type of *schadenfreude*. It can be seen in the dialogues among the contestants. Some of the examples with the date of the episodes which were used are as follows “You’re so crude, ordinary and inadequate (04.04.2014)”, “You’re not fit to be tolerated (12.02.2015)”, “I can’t stand to see you (12.14.2015)”, “You’re very

unnecessary (04.07.2016)". Short dialogue between two contestants below is a simple example of crude expressions used by contestants frequently.

C1: "I don't like you. I do not even want to look in your face."

C2: "Because you are jealous of me."

C1: "No, I really don't like you. That's why I do not like whatever you wear."

In another example one of the contestants says deridingly "I love you" and the answer is "But I do not like you". First one's reply is "Besides I will eliminate you first at gala."

Contestants criticize each other cruelly especially persons who they do not like. In fact they are aware of this situation. One of the contestant accepted this with her words "*Everyone is making bad comments to the girls who doesn't like and taking revenge with these comments.*"

Fairness is the second type of *schadenfreude* in the show and mostly seen kind of it. Generally at the end of an argument while one of the contestant leaving the studio in tears, others are looking behind her shaking their heads and smiling. For example in the episode dated 04th February 2015, when the contestant who had left the studio in previous episode was disqualified, others shake their heads with a confirmative gaze. If one of the contestants debates with another one, she prowles for revenge and becomes delighted when the person who had an argument is on the carpet. For example in the episode dated 20th March 2016, one of the contestants says "Bye, baby. Look now I have the style but you're leaving" to the eliminated contestant whom with had an argument in previous episode. Below there are some expressions of the signs of *schadenfreude* based on fairness in different episodes:

C1: "Everyone hates me!" (*She's crying*)

C2: "You're inside this situation because you did bad things"

C1: "Everyone comes over me, I'm so bored. I'm tired of falling in bad conditions, I feel so sad" (*She's crying*)

C2: "You deserve it and you want this"

C1: "You do not understand me" (*She's crying*)

C2: "You're not so naive. Do not cry in vain"

C1: "I cried all night"

C2: "It is your problem"

As it is seen at the dialogues above, contestants are quite merciless and harsh against each others. Another person's misfortune may provide people with an opportunity to protect or enhance their feelings of self-worth. Crushing with words and comments to another person is a way of feeling valued.

When a contestant gets negative feedback from the jury panel, generally other contestants' reactions are two types as either "justice was



done” or “happy not to be that person.” First reaction may be explained with deservingness and the proverb “As you sow, you shall reap.” For example one of the jury member reprehends one of the contestants “Do not act and set up here. Because one day it will find you (10.15.2014).” She seems like the voice of the poetic justice. Other contestants justify her by shaking their heads and clapping. In the same episode other jury member says to the same contestant “You shed crocodile tears.” In the episode dated 07th February 2015, two jury members and a contestant had an argument. One of the jury member says “You’re talking so much. Be yourself! You’re an angel here but a demon behind the cameras.” and the other one shouts “First, remove that stupid smile from your face. Be yourself! Be carefull on your words.”

Relief is the third type of *schadenfreude*. It is the situation which people think “Fortunately I am not in his/her place.” This kind of *schadenfreude* has been seen in the dialogues between the jury and a contestant more frequently. For example in the episode dated 09th January 2016, the jury member pecks at a contestant with words “Fix your seat first. Your friends are so good except you. You’re sitting flippantly.” Other contestants are blank and they are checking their sitting style immediately. In another example another jury member says “You think that you know everything. You now nothing!”

While the jury criticizes someone in a negative manner, all of the contestants are watching with different expressions such as relaxed, confused or worried. There is *schadenfreude* and also symbolic violence in another example. The jury member is almost shouting out “Look at my face while I am talking. What? Will you cry? You were giggling just now.” There is a warning in his voice to the other contestants. Scolded contestant is about to cry and others are in silence. Sometimes presenter tells off the contestants such as “If you behave appropriately, you do not ruin the order” or “You are outspoken and saying something to everybody. Do not forget the moment.” There is *schadenfreude* and also symbolic violence in this sample, too.

### ***Signs of the Symbolic Violence***

In almost every part of the show can be found on the example of symbolic violence. For all that it might be said that some of the arguments look like fictional scenes to improve the ratings. In fact human dignity has been ignored continuously for rating. It is worth saying that The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) amerced the channels for four times on the grounds of it. The jury members insult the competitors like the expressions of “I can call down you and you can not forget it”, “We treat well and you’re taking it seriously. Be yourself. Do not sauce!”, “Control your voice tone”, “You are not real, you are fake”, “You’re talking so much. Shut up!”, “You are so sassy.” In the episode dated 24th September 2014,

one of the jury member insulted one of the contestant by saying “country girl.” Competitors ridicule and humiliate each others such as the sentences of “Don’t make me come back there!”, “You’d better tape your mouth!” and “I will smack on your mouth!” In the episode dated 07th January 2016, while the jury were giving points a contestant criticized the jury and also the contestant hair style. She discussed with the jury and held up the other contestant’s hair by asking “Is there a hair style now? It’s ancient.” At the end she leaved the studio by shouting and crying.

## Conclusion

It can be regarded as a human weakness instead of sharing his/her pain, feeling pleased about someone who is in a difficult situation that we would not like if we were in this trouble. It is not an unexpected case feeling happy if the person is someone we do not like. This condition called *schadenfreude* may be accepted as a problematic but a humanitarian sense. In fact we watch this mood which has psychological and social roots in almost every types of TV programs. Television narratives fed by the weakness of the human, display the feelings, disagreements, contention and jealousy of the people. When we watch these programs, we see that many of those who participate are one of us. One of this kind of programs are Reality TV shows and its sub-genre fashion-themed shows. A tense and rivalry atmosphere has been kept alive in this competitions. Thus, contestants are being kept under pressure and their mood changes quickly. Symbolic violence and *schadenfreude* appear in the backhanded compliments of the competitors who criticize the each others condescendingly. *Schadenfreude* has been distinguished in the behaviors and expressions of the jury members, presenters and competitors and it becomes the part of the spectacle after the removed from being human weaknesses.

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